

## MEMORIAL

ALFRED BLALOCK, M.D.

By DAVID STRAYHORN, M.D.

Alfred Blalock died of cancer on September 15, 1964, at the age of 65, two and one-half months after his retirement from the positions of Professor of Surgery and Director of the Department of Surgery at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and Surgeon-in-Chief of the Johns Hopkins Hospital. It is difficult, in a brief memorial, to record adequately his many accomplishments and honors.

Dr. Blalock, the oldest of five children born to George Z. and Martha Davis Blalock, was born April 5, 1899, at Culloden, Georgia. While he was quite young the family moved to Jonesboro, Georgia, and established the home where his mother still resides.

In 1918, he received his B.A. degree from the University of Georgia and entered the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. His decision to study medicine was influenced by a wish of his father, who had been a patient at the Johns Hopkins Hospital. After receiving his M.D. degree in 1922, he spent the next three years as intern and assistant resident in surgery at the Johns Hopkins Hospital.

In 1925, Dr. Blalock was appointed the first surgical resident on the service of Dr. Barney Brooks in the newly reorganized Vanderbilt University School of Medicine and the newly built Vanderbilt University Hospital. The stimulus of a young, enthusiastic staff, highly motivated toward medical research, stirred his interest in investigative, as well as clinical surgery. Unfortunately, his career in academic surgery was interrupted early in its course by the development of pulmonary tuberculosis. A year was spent in treatment at Saranac Lake, and a year in Switzerland and other European countries. While recuperating in Europe he visited the laboratories of physiology and the surgical clinics of Great Britain and Europe, where his interest in circulatory physiology was further broadened and stimulated.

On return to Vanderbilt, instead of being discouraged by his illness, he worked with renewed vigor, carefully budgeting his time between work, play, and rest. While he devoted much time to teaching and to clinical surgery, he also did some of his most important investigative work on the subjects of hypovolemic shock, constrictive pericarditis, pulmonary hypertension, myasthenia gravis, and pulmonary tuberculosis. In 1938 he became Professor of Surgery.

In 1941, Dr. Blalock was appointed Professor of Surgery and Director of the Department of Surgery at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, and Surgeon-in-Chief of the Johns Hopkins Hospital. His return to Hopkins was the realization of an ambition he had cherished since his graduation, and he proceeded energetically with the organization of his teaching program and house staff training, while continuing actively in research and in operative surgery. Indeed, he carried out with a degree of excellence rarely possible in this era the combined duties of scientific investigator, teacher, surgeon, and administrator. In 1945 he, with Dr. Helen Taussig, published the report of the "blue-baby" operation. This created immediate interest and was followed by a steady stream of patients seeking treatment and requests for teaching appearances and lectures, which produced overwhelming demands on his time and increased his responsibilities. How well he handled these responsibilities is best expressed in a letter written to him in 1947 by Dr. Isaiah Bowman, President of Johns Hopkins University, congratulating him on his achievements, stating in part, "It is with growing pride and deep personal satisfaction that I have witnessed your growth in this environment and your steady advance to the first position in surgery in the United States. If these sentiments seem to be extravagant, please remember that I do not see you as often as I would like and it is sometimes a little embarrassing on both sides when things like these are spoken by one man to another."

Dr. Blalock was by nature a shy person. His manner was characterized by dignity, courtesy and warmth. He had a keen, Puckish sense of humor and was a delightful companion, who loved to be with people and enlivened any social gathering. His interest in people, his sympathy and understanding, coupled with a mature wisdom, made his counsel sought by many, and particularly by his students and house staff. Indeed a most impressive relationship developed between him and the men he trained. This relationship, almost like father and son, resulted in a closely knit, intensely loyal group of young men, many of whom have since become heads of departments or professors of surgery and carry on what has become known as the Blalock School of Surgery.

Dr. Blalock loved sports, both as a spectator and participant. He and Dr. Tinsley Harrison were Nashville doubles tennis champions in the late 1920's. Besides tennis, he also delighted in golf, fishing, and boating. While not a natural athlete, in fact unorthodox in form, he exhibited in sports the same striving for excellence that was evident in his professional life, as well as a competitive spirit that made him a challenging and interesting opponent.

Few doctors during their lifetime have had their accomplishments so

recognized and honored as did Dr. Blalock. Nor did anyone receive recognition more humbly or modestly.

He received honorary degrees from Yale, University of Turin, University of Rochester, University of Chicago, Lehigh, Hampden-Sydney, Emory, Georgetown, and the University of Saskatchewan. He belonged to 43 medical societies in the United States, England, Ireland, France, Belgium, Greece, Argentina, and Brazil. He became president of the Southern Surgical Association, the Society for Vascular Surgery, the American Association for Thoracic Surgery, the Society of Clinical Surgery, the American College of Surgeons, and the American Surgical Association. From 1938 to 1942 he delivered 42 honorary lectures, among these being the Gordon Wilson Lecture given before this Association in 1941 on "Shock or Peripheral Circulatory Failure." In addition to lectures, he published over 200 articles and a book on "Principles of Surgery, Shock and Other Problems." Included among his many awards are: the Gordon Wilson Medal, the Charles Mickle Fellowship, the Passano Award, the Rene Leriche Award, the Matas Award, the Distinguished Service Award of the A.M.A., the International Feltrinelli Prize for Medicine, the Forbes Award, the Gardner Award, and others.

In 1930, Dr. Blalock married Mary Chambers O'Bryan. Their three children, William Rice, Mary Elizabeth, and Alfred Dandy, are residents of Baltimore. Following the death of his first wife, Dr. Blalock married in 1959 Alice Waters, who contributed much to his happiness in his last years.

Dr. Blalock's last public appearance was in May of 1964, when he gave the featured speech at the Johns Hopkins Hospital's observance of its 75th Anniversary. It was announced at the time that the new Clinical Science Building would be named the Blalock Building.

While Dr. Blalock has contributed much that will insure his lasting memory, the greatest contribution, in the opinion of many, is the group of young men whom he has trained and imbued with the same ideals he devoted to the teaching and practice of surgery.